

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (currently amended) For use in a conferencing system incorporating noise characteristic estimation of a ~~signal of interest transmitted in a first direction~~ first of two bidirectionally transmitted signals, the improvement comprising detecting ~~audio signal at~~ at least one of voice activity and in-band tone activity in a signal transmitted in a first direction opposite to said first ~~signal of interest~~ and in response ceasing said noise characteristic estimation.
2. (currently amended) The improvement of claim 1, further comprising detecting ~~audio signal at least one of voice activity and in-band tone activity~~ in said first ~~signal of interest~~ and in response ceasing said noise characteristic estimation in a direction of said first signal.
3. (original) The improvement of claim 2, wherein said noise characteristic is noise level.
4. (original) The improvement of claim 1, wherein said noise characteristic is noise level.
- 5.- 6. (canceled)
7. (currently amended) Apparatus for controlling noise characteristic estimation in a conferencing system, comprising:
  - a first noise characteristic estimator for estimating a noise characteristic of a signal of interest transmitted in a first direction through said conferencing system; and
  - a first voice activity detector for detecting ~~audio signal activity at least one of voice activity and in-band tone activity~~ in a signal transmitted through said conferencing system in a direction opposite to said signal of interest and in response disabling said the first noise characteristic estimator;

a second noise characteristic estimator for estimating a noise characteristic of a signal of interest transmitted in a direction opposite to said first direction, through said conferencing system; and

a second voice activity detector for detecting at least one of voice activity and in-band tone activity in a signal transmitted through said conferencing system in said first direction and in response disabling the second noise characteristic estimator.

8. (canceled)

9. (original) The apparatus of claim 7, wherein said noise characteristic is noise level.

10. - 12. (canceled)

13. (currently amended) A conferencing system, comprising:  
a line input for receiving a line-in audio signal from an audio signal line;  
a line output for transmitting a line-out audio signal to said audio line;  
a speaker connected to said line input for broadcasting said line-in audio signal;  
a microphone connected to said line output for applying said line-out audio signal to said line output;  
an echo canceller connected to said line input and said line output for canceling echo signals of said line-in audio signal appearing in said line-out audio signal;  
at least one two noise level estimator estimators, one of said noise level estimators for estimating noise level in one of either said line-in audio signal or and the other of said noise level estimators for estimating noise level in said line-out audio signal; and  
at least one two voice activity detector detectors, one of said voice activity detectors for detecting voice activity in the other of said line-in audio signal or said line-out audio signal and in response disabling said at least one other of said noise level estimator estimators, and the other of said voice activity detectors for detecting voice activity in said line-out audio signal and in response disabling said one of said noise level estimators.

14. (canceled)

15. (currently amended) The conferencing system of claim ~~14~~ 13, wherein said ~~at least one other of said~~ voice activity ~~deteeter~~ detectors is connected to said line-output and said echo canceller, and said ~~further one of said~~ voice activity ~~deteeter~~ detectors is connected to said line input.

16. (canceled)

17. (currently amended) The conferencing system of claim 13, wherein ~~at least one said other of said~~ voice activity ~~deteeter~~ detectors is connected to said microphone and said echo canceller.

18. (canceled)